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OR

VIEW OF THE MORAL WORLD,

BY ELIHU PALMER.

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Comments upon the Sacred Writings of the Jews and Christians. Exodus Chapter 7.

“ **A**ND I will harden Pharoah’s heart, and multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.” Ye learned believers in revelation, will you be so kind as to tell us what good it did to multiply all these signs and wonders—when the same power by which they were wrought was exerted in hardening Pharoah’s heart in such a manner that the wonders should be incapable of producing any effect? This is God versus God again, as we formerly mentioned in the case of the serpent, Genesis, chapter third—Here also is another flagrant departure from the principles of theism; we had occasion once before to notice the abominable profanity of charging God with hardening the heart of man; it is in fact making God author of those crimes which result from such hardness of heart; it is charging the wicked actions of man upon the creator himself. The montheism of the Jews is entitled to no respect; because simplicity of essence is tarnished with duplicity of character, and loaded with immoral attributes which would disgrace even a common man. It is astonishing that those believers in revealed religion, who pretend to be the only true friends of God, and who also believe that God is friend to nobody but themselves, should set up a system of ethics with external purity proclaimed upon the face of the record—that is upon the record of their own assertions, while every thing essentially contained in this system places the Supreme Creator in a state of acrimonious hostility against morals,

truth and philosophy. The sentiment should become impressive upon the human mind that a total want of all theological conceptions ought to be preferred to the indulgence of ideas which tarnish the immortal glory of the Supreme Being, and sink him to a level with the meanest of his creatures; to harden the heart of man is to make it wicked—moral obduracy is a moral crime—benevolence and justice are important qualities; they are the distinguishing properties of intellectual beings, and if in these the Jewish God was deficient, he and his biographers have forfeited all claim to the just approbation of posterity. The fact is that Moses, or the authors of the five first books of the Old Testament, created a monster—formed upon the model of their own passions, partaking of their own vices, enlisted in their own quarrels, and no better than themselves. Let those who are weak or wicked enough to worship such a being be permitted to go on in their dulusion, provided they do not trouble the peace of society; but men attached to the religion of nature will adore only that pure and immortal Being whose essence is interwoven with the vast fabric of the universe! Before him we bow with respect—The phantoms of antiquity will perish with the touch of reason.

COMMUNICATION.

The following reflections, written last winter, were occasioned by *certain* expressions in some of the public papers, against Deism, and the writings of Thomas Paine on that subject.

“*Great is Diana of the Ephesians,*” was the cry of the people of Ephesus;* and the cry of “*our holy religion*” has been the cry of superstition in some instances, and of hypocrisy in others, from that day to this.

The Brahmin, the follower of Zoroastor, the Jew, the Mahometan, the church of Rome, the Greek church, the Protestant church, split into several hundred contradictory sectaries, preaching, in some instances, damna-

* *Act*, c. 19, v. 28.

tion against each other, all cry out, “*our holy religion.*” The Calvanist who ~~damns~~ children of a span long to hell to burn for ever for the glory of God (and this is called christianity), and the Universalist who preaches that all shall be saved and none shall be damned, (and this also is called christianity) boasts alike of their *holy religion* and their Christian faith. Something more, therefore, is necessary than mere *cry* and wholesale assertion, and that something is TRUTH; and as enquiry is the road to truth, he that is opposed to enquiry is not a friend to truth.

The God of Truth is not the god of fable; when, therefore, any book is introduced into the world as the word of God, and made a ground-work for religion, it ought to be scrutinized more than other books to see if it bear evidence of being what it is called. Our reverence to God, demands that we do this, lest we ascribe to God what is not his, and our duty to ourselves demands it lest we take fable for fact, and rest our hope of salvation on a false foundation. It is not our calling a book *holy* that makes it so, any more than our calling a religion *holy* that entitles it to the name. Enquiry, therefore, is necessary in order to arrive at Truth. But enquiry must have some principle to proceed on, some standard to judge by, superior to human authority.

When we survey the works of creation, the revolutions of the planetary system, and the whole economy of what is called nature, which is no other than the laws the Creator has prescribed to matter, we see unerring order and universal harmony reigning throughout the whole. No one part contradicts another. The sun does not run against the moon, nor the moon against the sun, nor the planets against each other—Every thing keeps its appointed time and place. This harmony in the works of God is so obvious, that the farmer of the field, though he cannot calculate eclipses, is as sensible of it as the philosophical astronomer. He sees the God of order in every part of the visible universe.

Here then is the standard to which every thing must

be brought, that pretends to be the work or word of God, and by this standard it must be judged, independently of any thing, and every thing, that man can say or do. His opinion is like a feather in the scale compared with the standard that God himself has set up.

It is, therefore, by this standard that the bible, and all other books pretending to be the word of God, (and there are many of them in the world) must be judged and not by the opinions of men or the decrees of ecclesiastical councils. These have been so contradictory that they have often rejected in one council what they had voted to be the word of God in another, and admitted what had been before rejected. In this state of uncertainty in which we are, and which is rendered still more uncertain by the numerous contradictory sectaries that have sprung up since the time of Luther and Calvin, what is man to do? The answer is easy. Begin at the root—Begin with the Bible itself. Examine it with the utmost strictness. It is our duty so to do. Compare the parts with each other, and the whole with the harmonious magnificent order that reigns throughout the visible universe, and the result will be, that if the same Almighty wisdom that created the universe, dictated also the bible, the bible will be as harmonious and as magnificent in all its parts, and in the whole, as the universe is. But if instead of this, the parts are found to be discordant, contradicting in one place what is said in another, (as in 2 Sam. chap. 24, v. 1st. and the 1st. Chron. chap. 21, v. 1st, where the same action is ascribed to God in one book and to Satan in the other), abounding also in idle and obscene stories, and representing the Almighty as a passionate whimsical Being continually changing his mind, making and unmaking his own works as if he did not know what he was about, we may take it for certainty that the creator of the universe is not the author of such a book, that it is not the word of God, and that to call it so is to dishonour his name. The Quakers who are a people more moral and regular in their conduct than the people of other sectaries, and generally allowed so to be, do not

hold the bible to be the word of God. They call it *a history of the times*, and a bad history it is, and also a history of bad men and of bad actions, and abounding with bad examples.

For several centuries past the dispute has been about doctrines. It is now about fact. Is the Bible the word of God or is it not? for until this point is established no doctrine drawn from the bible can afford real consolation to man, and he ought to be careful he does not mistake delusion for truth. This is a case that concerns all men alike.

There has always existed in Europe, and also in America, since its establishment, a numerous description of men, (I do not here mean the Quakers) who did not, and do not, believe the bible to be the word of God. These men never formed themselves into an established society, but are to be found in all the sectaries that exist, and are more numerous than any, perhaps equal to all, and are daily increasing. From *Deus* the latin word for God they have been denominated *Deists*, that is believers in God. It is the most honourable appellation can be given to man, because it is derived immediately from the Deity. It is not an artificial name like Episcopalian, Presbyterian, &c but is a name of sacred signification, and to revile it is to revile the name of God.

Since then there is so much doubt and uncertainty about the bible, some asserting, and others denying it to be the word of God, it is best that the whole matter come out. It is necessary for the information of the world that it should. A better time cannot offer than whilst the government, patronizing no one sect or opinion in preference to another, protects equally the rights of all; and certainly every man must spurn the idea of an ecclesiastical tyranny engrossing the rights of the press and holding it free only for itself.

Whilst the terrors of the Church and the tyranny of the state hung like a pointed sword over Europe, men were commanded to believe what the church told them or go to the stake. All enquiries into the authenticity of the

bible were shut out by the inquisition: We ought therefore to suspect that a great mass of information respecting the bible and the introduction of it into the world has been suppressed by the united tyranny of Church and State, for the purpose of keeping people in ignorance, and which ought to be known. The bible has been received by the protestants on the authority of the Church of Rome, and on no other authority. It is she that has said it is the word of God. We do not admit the authority of that Church with respect to its pretended *infallibility*, its manufactured miracles, its setting itself up to forgive sins, its amphibious doctrine of transubstantiation, &c. and we ought to be watchful with respect to any book introduced by her, or her ecclesiastical councils, and called by her the Word of God; and the more so, because it was by propagating that belief and supporting it by fire and faggot that she kept up her temporal power. That the belief of the bible does no good in the world may be seen by the irregular lives of those, as well priests as laymen, who profess to believe it to be the word of God, and the moral lives of the Quakers who do not. It abounds with too many ill examples to be made a rule for moral life, and were a man to copy after the lives of some of its most celebrated characters, he would come to the gallows.

Thomas Paine has written to shew that the bible is not the word of God, that the books it contains were not written by the persons to whom they are ascribed, that it is an anonymous book, and that we have no authority for calling it the word of God, or for saying it was written by inspired penmen, since we do not even know who the writers were. This is the opinion, not only of Thomas Paine, but of thousands and tens of thousands of the most respectable characters in the United States and in Europe. These men have the same right to their opinions as others have to a contrary opinion, and the same right to publish them. Ecclesiastical tyranny is not admissible in the United States.

With respect to morality, the writings of Thomas Paine are remarkable for purity and benevolence; and

though he often enlivens them with touches of wit and humour, he never loses sight of the real solemnity of his subject. No man's morals either with respect to his Maker, himself, or his neighbour, can suffer by the writings of Thomas Paine.

It is now too late to abuse Deism, especially in a country where the press is free, *or where free presses can be established*. It is a religion that has God for its patron and derives its name from him. The thoughtful mind of man, wearied with the endless contentions of sectaries against sectaries, doctrines against doctrines, and priests against priests, finds its repose at last in the contemplative belief and worship of one God and the practice of morality, for as Pope wisely says,

“He can’t be wrong whose life is in the right.”

Profession of faith of a Savoyard Curate, from Rousseau, continued from our last.

Providence hath left man at liberty, not that he should do evil, but good, by choice. It hath capacitated him to make such choice, in making a proper use of the faculties it hath bestowed on him: his powers, however, are at the same time, so limited and confined, that the abuse he makes of his liberty is not of importance enough to disturb the general order of the universe. The evil done by man falls upon his own head, without making any change in the system of the world, without hindering the human species from being preserved, in spite of themselves. To complain, therefore, that God doth not prevent man from doing evil, is in fact to complain that he hath given a superior excellence to human nature; that he hath ennobled our actions, by annexing to them the merit of virtue. The highest enjoyment is that of being contented with ourselves. It is in order to deserve this contentment that we are placed here on earth, and endowed with liberty; that we are tempted by our passions, and restrained by conscience. What could Omnipotence itself do more in our favour? Could it have established a

contradiction in our nature, or have allotted a reward for well-doing, to a being incapable of doing ill? Is it necessary, in order to prevent man from being wicked, to reduce all his faculties to a simple instinct, and make him a mere brute? No, never can I reproach the Deity for having given me a soul, made in his own image, that I might be free, good, and happy, like himself.

It is the abuse of our faculties which makes us wicked and miserable. Our cares, our anxieties, our griefs, are all owing to ourselves. Moral evil is incontestibly our own work, and physical evil would in fact be nothing, did not our vices render us sensible of it. Is it not for our preservation that nature makes us sensible of our wants? Is not pain of body an indication that the machine is out of order, and a caution for us to provide a remedy? and as to death—do not the wicked render both our lives and their own miserable? Who is there desirous of living here for ever? Death is a remedy for all the evils we inflict on ourselves; nature will not let us suffer perpetually. To how few evils are men subject, who live in primeval simplicity! They hardly know any disease, and are irritated by scarcely any passions: they neither foresee death, nor suffer by the apprehensions of it; when it approaches, their miseries render it desirable, and it is to them no evil. If we could be contented with being what we are, we should have no inducement to lament our fate; but we inflict on ourselves a thousand real evils, in seeking after an imaginary happiness. Those who are impatient under trifling inconveniences, must expect to suffer much greater.

To be continued.

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